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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 002269

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/05/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [OSCE](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY: KURDISH MAYOR'S CONTROVERSIAL REMARKS
BRING STRONG REACTION FROM RULING PARTY

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner for reasons 1.4(b),
(d)

1.(C) Summary: Democratic Society Party (DTP) Diyarbakir Mayor Osman Baydemir's recent remarks that the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) is discriminating against his majority Kurdish city drew strong reactions. PM Erdogan rejected the allegations and accused Baydemir of exploiting his own constituents for political purposes. Opposition parties alleged Erdogan's weak policies on terrorism had encouraged Baydemir. DTP said Baydemir intended only to draw attention to the GOT's neglect of the Southeast. This latest verbal battle, coming just as all parties are sounding out the DTP's presence in Parliament for the first time in over a decade, suggests increased tension to come. End summary.

Diyarbakir Mayor Brashly Criticizes GOT

2.(U) Diyarbakir Mayor Osman Baydemir drew ire when he told the press on September 4 that his southeastern city was subject to government discrimination and his pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) was "ready to fight" those who want to make political inroads into the "fortress" of Diyarbakir. Baydemir was responding to claims by the Minister of Agriculture that AKP had increased its share of votes in the Southeast due to DTP's poor performance in improving conditions in municipalities its mayors governed. Following the remarks, a Diyarbakir prosecutor opened an investigation on Baydemir, and politicians from across the spectrum weighed in with comments.

AKP and Opposition Parties Respond

3.(U) Prime Minister Erdogan categorically rejected the claims of discrimination against the city and remarked at the September 4 AKP parliamentary group meeting, "No one should try to exploit the people of one city. The municipalities should produce projects instead of words." Erdogan said he did not instruct the Interior Ministry to launch an investigation into Baydemir. Interior Minister Besir Atalay declined to comment on the matter.

4.(U) Opposition Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and

Republican People's Party (CHP) used the opportunity to criticize AKP. MHP deputy party leader Mehmet Sandir stated that AKP's "soft stance" on terrorism and Erdogan's discourse on ethnicity had encouraged Baydemir. CHP deputy chairman Mustafa Ozyurek claimed that AKP had failed to support municipalities administered by opposition parties and said PM Erdogan was now treating Diyarbakir as a city that lies outside of Turkey.

DTP Sticks By Its Man

5.(U) DTP defended Baydemir. Diyarbakir deputy Akin Birdal said Baydemir was trying to draw attention to the GOT's failure to give the city appropriate financial support to the city. According to Birdal, Baydemir's statements were intended to bring peace, not stir controversy. Despite constantly being put in the spotlight, DTP would continue to work constructively in parliament for tolerance and dialogue.

Debate Foreshadows Tensions To Come

6.(U) Turkish commentators covered the incident from a variety of angles. "Milliyet's" Guneri Civaoglu referred to Baydemir as a "roaring mouse" whose comments proved that DTP feared losing the Diyarbakir Municipality in local elections scheduled for 2009. Ismail Kucukkaya of "Aksam" believed the incident foreshadowed an escalation in tension between AKP and DTP. "Sabah's" Asli Aydintasbas called on the center parties to be patient with DTP, lest the party be driven from parliament, making a peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem

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impossible.

7.(C) Comment: This latest war of words comes as all parties are still sounding out DTP's presence in Parliament, and while legal pressure against DTP members continues unabated. Cool minds and rational dialogue are needed at this delicate juncture. Baydemir's continued willingness to deliver brash remarks is a bellwether of tensions to come. AKP's immediate response indicates Erdogan is well aware of the counter-pressures already at work in parliament; he is putting DTP on notice that he is not about to put other projects at risk. End comment.

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